

Message Text

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ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

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APPROVED BY MR. TARNOFF

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O 291843Z SEP 77 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 234556 TOSEC 100031

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT BANGKOK 22058 ACTION SECSTATE SEPT 29

QUOTE S E C R E T BANGKOK 22058

NODIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT TH

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK -- POLITICAL
DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: MY CONVERSATION ALONE AT LUNCH TODAY WITH
GENERAL KRIANGSAK ON ECONOMIC MATTERS (REPORTED SEPTTEL)
LED EASILY INTO A DISCUSSION OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION
IN THAILAND, DURING WHICH IT BECAME CLEAR THAT IN GENERAL
KRIANGSAK'S MIND AT THE MOMENT THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER TO
BRING ABOUT THE DOWNFALL OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT BUT HOW AND
WHEN TO DO IT. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER THE DISCUSSION REPORTED SEPTTEL ON THE IMPORTANCE
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HE ATTACHES TO EARLY ACTION IN DEVELOPING THE NATURAL GAS
DEPOSITS IN THE GULF OF SIAM, GENERAL KRIANGSAK TURNED TO THE
INCOMPETENCE, OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT AND ITS INABILITY TO
TAKE STEPS WHICH WILL EFFECTIVELY IMPROVE THE CONFIDENCE
OF DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN INVESTORS. KRIANGSAK SAID THAT
THE PRIME MINISTER WAS A "RIP VAN WINKLE" WHOSE STUBBORNESS
AND UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE ADVICE WERE EXCEEDINGLY DETRIMENTAL

TO THAILAND. HE SAID THE PRIME MINISTER WAS A FAILURE BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. AS I HAD PROBABLY HEARD FROM THE OFFICIALS WHO ACCOMPANIED HIM ON HIS RECENT TRIP TO KOREA, JAPAN AND PHILIPPINES, HIS PERFORMANCE HAD BEEN HIGHLY INADEQUATE. ACCORDING TO KRIANGSAK, PRESIDENT MARCOS HAD DESCRIBED THANIN AS NAIVE. OFFICIALS OF OTHER COUNTRIES HAD RIDICULED HIS BLATANT ANTI-COMMUNISM. KRIANGSAK CITED THE PRIME MINISTER'S UNWILLINGNESS TO SEEK GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE PRC AS INDICATIVE OF HIS INCAPACITY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT, THANIN WAS VIEWED AS NARROWMINDED, BIGOTED AND UNWILLING TO TAKE ADVICE.

2. I HAZARDED THE THOUGHT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S IMAGE AS "MISTER CLEAN" MIGHT WELL BE HELPFUL TO HIM, BUT KRIANGSAK IMMEDIATELY NOTED THAT THIS POSITIVE ASPECT WAS COMPLETELY OUTWEIGHED BY OTHER NEGATIVE QUALITIES WHICH WERE CLEARLY PERCEIVED BY THE PUBLIC. KRIANGSAK SAID THERE WERE THREE COURSES OF ACTION WHICH MIGHT BE PURSUED. THE FIRST WAS WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS A "DRASTIC" MILITARY ACTION. THIS, HE SAID, HE SINCERELY WISHED TO AVOID. HE NOTED IN PASSING THAT MANY YOUNGER OFFICERS WERE CLAMORING FOR HIM TO ASSUME POLITICAL POWER. SECOND, A GOVERNMENT RESHUFFLE MIGHT BE PROPOSED. THIS WOULD PROVOKE A POLITICAL CRISIS OWING TO THE WELL-KNOWN UNWILLINGNESS OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO CHANGE ANY MEMBER OF THE CABINET. A THIRD POSSIBILITY WOULD BE A REPETITION OF OCTOBER 1976. I EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT
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THE STUDENTS WERE PREPARED TO MOUNT ACTIVITIES OF THE KIND WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE FALL OF THE SENI GOVERNMENT LAST YEAR. KRIANGSAK DISAGREED AND SAID THAT MANY ELEMENTS IN SOCIETY, AND PARTICULARLY ORGANIZED LABOR, COULD BE EXPECTED TO MOVE DECISIVELY AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

3. IN DISCUSSING THE FOREGOING, KRIANGSAK WAS REFLECTIVE AND CALM. HE SAID THAT HE WISHED TO DO WHAT WAS RIGHT FOR THAILAND AND TO AVOID ANY "DRASTIC" SOLUTIONS. IT WAS EVIDENT, HOWEVER, THAT A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE SOON AS THE GOVERNMENT WAS CLEARLY INCAPABLE OF TAKING THE DECISIONS WHICH WERE NECESSARY. KRIANGSAK SAID THAT THE PMAC (PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISORY COUNCIL) WAS NOW VERY WEAK AND THAT THERE WERE FEW PEOPLE WHO WERE THINKING CONSTRUCTIVELY ABOUT NATIONAL POLICY. AS HE HAS IN THE PAST, HE HANDLED THE CONVERSATION WITH RATHER SHY EXPRESSIONS OF HIS DESIRE TO DO HIS DUTY TOWARDS KING AND COUNTRY.

4. COMMENT: THE DEPARTMENT MAY RECALL THAT WHEN I LAST DISCUSSED THE SUBJECT OF POSSIBLE POLITICAL CHANGES WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK ON JUNE 9 (BANGKOK 12634) HE WAS CASTING THE LIKELIHOOD OF HIS ASSUMING POLITICAL POWER INTO A RATHER DISTANT FUTURE.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TODAY'S DISCUSSION IS NOT ONLY THE CANDOR
WITH WHICH HE DISCUSSED HIS CURRENT POLITICAL DILEMMA BUT THE
NEW, SHORTER TIME FRAME WITHIN WHICH HE HOPES TO OPERATE
IN BRINGING ABOUT THE DOWNFALL OF THE THANIN GOVERNMENT.
WHITEHOUSE UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONAL OPINION, PRIME MINISTER, INVESTMENT CLIMATE, GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 29-Sep-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE234556
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: PTARNOFF
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: N770006-0124
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 2
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977097/aaaaafiq.tel
Line Count: 121
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a1d17f47-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13-Apr-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1292391
Secure: LOCK1
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK -- POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS SUMMARY: MY CONVERSATION ALONE AT LUNCH TODAY WIT
TAGS: PINT, EINV, TH
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a1d17f47-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009